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ABSTRACT

This handbook is organized to address the common needs of Bachelor of Education candidates and the needs of associate teachers. Part I discusses the role and responsibilities of the associate teacher and lists questions that candidates frequently ask as they enter the practicum. Part II discusses model demonstrations for the associate teacher, observation and coaching, and counselling the candidate when necessary. Part III presents questions and discussion points for conferencing. The final section lists some difficult issues that frequently develop in the practicum when university and classroom realities fail to converge. (JD)

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ASSOCIATE TEACHER HANDBOOK

SP032 002

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This Handbook is dedicated to these B.Ed. Graduates of Nipissing University College, 1988-89 (seminar participants):

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- Foreword -

This Handbook is the result of intensive and friendly collaboration between Dr. Roger Neil, Ph.D. (Nipissing University College) and five associate teachers: Karen-Anne McArthur (Nipissing District Roman Catholic Separate School Board), Lee Richmond, David Shields, Wilston Steer, Marion Wheeler (Nipissing Board of Education). It has been organized to address common needs of B.Ed. candidates and the needs of associate teachers that have consistently been expressed within the Ministry of Education course, The Associate Teacher.

- 1990

PART I
BEING AN ASSOCIATE - WHAT TO KNOW FROM THE OUTSET

There are many reasons for becoming an associate teacher, but there is only one main purpose — that is to enable practical teacher training. Yet, the vital role of the associate teacher in this process is often taken for granted. This handbook has been put together with care to provide practical information about three areas that associates frequently question: associate methodology, evaluation, and how the candidate's university responsibilities and expectations mesh with actual classroom demands.

First, to whom is the associate communicating? Today's B.Ed. candidates have already earned one degree and often have a number of years of work experience. The "student teachers" of the 1990's have typically formed a mature perspective of their career goals, and are committed to lifelong professional development. Their average age is nearing thirty. Not only are they not the "kids" of the Teacher's College - they frequently have children of their own.

Commonly, B.Ed. candidates arrive at your door with many unspoken questions. Four prime ones are

1. "Will I be able to manage class discipline?"
2. "Will I be able to keep students interested in learning?"

3a. "Am I really suited to teaching?"

3b. "How can I learn more about my own strengths and weaknesses while I'm here?"

4. How do teachers work with parents, principals, and other teachers?"

Correspondingly, B.Ed. graduates who have completed one year of actual teaching give advice that echoes these prime questions:

1. Find out more about classroom management.
2. Focus seriously on planning and instruction techniques.
3. Find and practise ways to manage stress and achieve progressive development.
4. Discover what makes your relationship "tick" with peers, principal and parents.

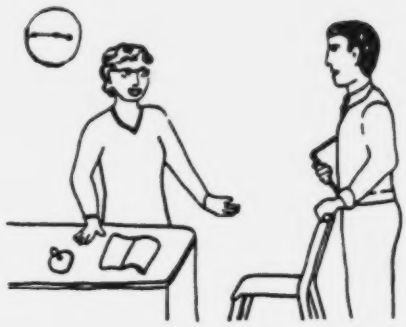
When introducing oneself to the candidate, a valuable consideration is: Do you strongly wish that your own style be emulated or instead place more stress on the development of their personal style?

Although there is no profile of a "generic" B.Ed. candidate it would doubtless be productive for associates to know specific questions that these candidates have voiced time and again, once they've entered the practicum:

- [ ] Is day one considered an observation day?
- [ ] Will I receive pre-teaching information?
- [ ] What time should I be at school?
- [ ] Where may I park?
- [ ] To whom do I report?
- [ ] Is there a school policy?
- [ ] Is there a code of behaviour?
- [ ] Who will handle severe discipline problems?
- [ ] What teaching style will be demonstrated? (i.e. open concept; learning centred; rotary...)
- [ ] Will there be a school orientation?
- [ ] Will I have access to supplies?
- [ ] Is there a dress code for teachers?
- [ ] When will daily conferencing occur?
- [ ] Which lesson plan format is expected?
- [ ] Will expectations be clearly defined?
- [ ] Where will my daily evaluation be recorded?
- [ ] Are there any students who require particular attention?
- [ ] Will I be able to try out different methods?
- [ ] Will I be left alone in the classroom?
- [ ] Are there specific classroom management routines of which I should be aware?
- [ ] Will I be able to discuss my final evaluation, and sign it?

PART II
FOUR BASIC METHODS FOR THE PRACTICUM ASSOCIATE

1. THE CONFERENCE:



The time that is set aside for the B.Ed. candidate (student-teacher) and the associate to talk about all aspects of teaching is the foundation of the practicum. There are three practical considerations that make a very big difference in the overall success of the practicum conference:

1. daily communication - finding a mutually convenient time to talk when memories are fresh;
2. clearly shared expression of the main purpose(s) of the conference;
3. privacy - out of earshot of other staff, and if possible away from pressing class demands. This is not to ignore the importance of either spontaneous class dialogue or the vital summative practicum conference.

While conferences sometimes include faculty advisors (particularly helpful in clarifying evaluation criteria or in the mediation of problems) the role of the experienced classroom teacher is perhaps best described within the daily conference as that of a sounding board. The conference provides a forum for expert advice. Conferencing is most complete when it involves a process of an initial pre-conference, then teaching, followed by a post-conference.

An atmosphere of trust and respect is certainly supported by careful observation and note-taking. It helps the B.Ed. candidate's performance when they know that the associates anecdotal record is not critically negative, but is instead written to share ideas, assess growth, and solve problems. And if a positive comment isn't possible, a positive attitude of self-assessment can usually be elicited by an initial question like "How do you feel the lesson went?" or "How might you change the lesson that just took place?" After all, direct criticism can be hard to accept, even from those who are close to us.

There are actually two types of conferences: Those that are general and those focused on one or two specific pre-determined aspects of the lesson. The general conference can be a valuable vehicle for expression of fears, successes and immediate learning. Often it is a first step for the student teacher in experiencing a collegial relationship. Also the conference is a forum for discussing possible areas of contention or misunderstanding before they cause a breakdown in communication. ie., over apparent lack of planning, or level of commitment. In comparison, a specific type of conference would focus on individual areas of concern that are outlined in the faculty evaluation form.

CONFERENCE POST MORTEM:

1 - Were there a variety of comments by both the associate and the B.Ed. candidates? (ie., positive/negative, planning, teaching skills etc.)

2 - Has the candidate approached me with new ideas or specific problems?

3 - Has the candidate been self-critical to the degree that they later implement improvements or new ideas in class?

2. MODEL DEMONSTRATIONS:

When the associate demonstrates a specific method of teaching, the candidates see theory in action. This enables them to focus complex ideas and questions about teaching and learning.
Certainly the live example of the teacher interacting with children to illustrate a method or technique is a powerful teaching tool. The demonstration is at the heart of all true internships. "Do as I do, not merely do as I say."

Examples of areas that B.Ed. candidates most often desire to see demonstrated are (priorized):

1. varieties of reading instruction
2. reinforcement of math concepts
3. grouping dynamics
4. the integration of subjects at a specific grade level
5. timing of lesson presentations
6. evaluation methods; general record keeping
7. "improved versions" of particular problems that candidates may have exhibited.

The use of video playback of actual classroom teaching has been found to be a highly effective learning tool by both associates and B.Ed. candidates, once their initial unease with the medium wears off. Whole-class and small group instruction can be "frozen" and re-considered carefully once the children have left for the day.

Less formally, candidates do benefit by the example of their associate's teaching style, their scheduling of daily activities (transitions, opening exercises); perception of class norms (work standards, homework expectations, monitoring responsibilities) and the associate's reasons for physical arrangements (seating, storage) in the class. Sometimes the most valuable demonstration is the experienced teacher's ability to "go with the flow" of the whole class needs (in the face of the year's first snowfall; or in reaction to an assignment that was inadvertently set above the learners' capabilities).

Research reveals that demonstration modelling does not, in general, disrupt the regular classroom atmosphere or management. However, there are some problem areas to overcome in making a demonstration: they can be time-consuming if special preparations or explanations are needed; the candidate may pick-up on factors extraneous to the main message; it is difficult to demonstrate an experienced teacher's vital decision making and thinking.

MODEL DEMONSTRATION - POST MORTEM:

1. **Have I clarified the key steps of my method during the demonstration?**

2. **Have I explained the relevance of my application to the model demonstration?**

3. **In addition to specific model demonstrations, have I explained how and why decisions have been made throughout the day?**

3. OBSERVATION AND COACHING:

There are three steps to competent observation and coaching:

1. Observe the practise-teaching session and interject when necessary.

2. Reflect on what the candidate has done.

3. Help the candidate to recognize strengths in their approach, and to improve strategies for the less effective procedures.

Success in coaching is found to depend upon a number of factors. The active maintenance of respect and trust helps to support a problem-solving attitude in pre and post teaching conferences. The associate's ensurance of tolerance and confidentiality informs the candidate that they may learn from their mistakes. Fundamentally, good coaching depends upon clear analysis of actual practises, rather than statements of opinion.

There are several ways of recording observations:

1. verbatim dialogue - brief, specific events are framed in quotes of classroom dialogue;

2. anecdotal reports - ordered narratives of classroom activities that may include some dialogue;

3. literal timing - noting the exact length of the classroom activities, in whole and in the various parts of the lesson;

4. tallying - notation of the frequency of behaviour(s), remarks, or events;

5. listing - one or two word descriptions of observations (inconsistencies, highlights).

As the practicum develops and as the candidate's year of training progresses, they ought to take on a more complete roster of daily responsibilities. While the coach needs to be non-intrusive, the candidate can benefit from the spontaneous insights that the coach may offer by "stepping in and out" of the lesson.

OBSERVATION/COACHING/POST MORTEM:

1. **Did I observe the entire lesson or activity?**

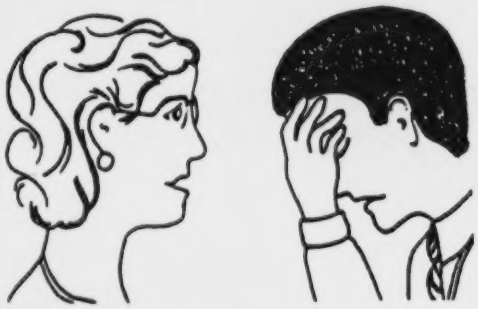
2. **How have I recorded my observations?**

3. **Was my interjection timely and appropriate?**

4. COUNSELLING:

This is occasionally found to be a necessary part of the associate's role when:

1. the B.Ed. candidate's anxieties need to be addressed;
2. when the associate feels the candidate may be unsuccessful in the program. Although most associates or faculty advisors are not given professional training in counselling, there are a small percentage of B.Ed. candidates (typically less than 5%) that require such counselling.



In the case of establishing a forum to discuss serious inabilities of the candidate, both timing and procedures are important. The sooner serious practicum difficulties are recognized, the better. The first post-conference is not too early to talk over such problems. In the infrequent placement that is characterized by conflict and failure, trouble shooting procedures are not often clearly outlined to associates. The key rule-of-thumb is to simultaneously inform the principal as well as the faculty of education of the situation. The candidate's problem should then be addressed by the principal, the faculty advisor and the associate teacher.

COUNSELLING - POST MORTEM

1. Do I know some of the candidate's personal and academic background and circumstances?

2. Have I gained the cooperation of the principal and the faculty advisor?

3. Have I been fair in trying to identify the candidate's strengths and weaknesses?

Candidate: _____
Date: _____

TO BE PHOTOCOPIED

A TOOL FOR CONFERENCING

PART III
QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSION POINTS

The Faculties of Education in Ontario have varying terms to describe and evaluate the practicum, yet they share the following seven basic concepts. These questions and discussion points are guidelines for conferencing, and are most valuable when used to formatively guide the candidates' progress.

1. **SUBJECT FIELD COMPETENCE: Do you feel that your knowledge of the subject matter was adequate for each lesson taught?**

"Discussion Points"

- Clarification of the topic
- Knowledge of content
- Awareness of own limitations (knowledge, skills, attitudes)
- Appropriate application of knowledge to grade level and pupil interest

2. **PLANNING AND RESOURCE MATERIAL: Do you feel that the planning was appropriate to the grade level and included sufficient resources?**

"Discussion Points"

- Pre-assessment (aware of pupils' needs and abilities)
- Established aims and objectives of lesson in evidence
- Lesson plans - appropriate to learning environment (learning centres, rotary, teacher directed)
- Familiar and competent with audio-visual equipment and resource materials

3. **COMMUNICATION: Do you feel your communication skills are appropriate to this grade level?**

"Discussion Points"

- Choice of language suitable to grade level
- Correct grammar, freedom from slang and speech mannerisms
- Effective voice production (articulation, pronunciation and projection)
- Voice reflects a confident and assured manner

4. **TEACHER/PUPIL RAPPORT:** Do you feel that your rapport with the students was both professional and sensitive?

"Discussion Points"

- Professional sensitivity to feelings and needs of students
- Enthusiasm and initiative
- Rapport demonstrates fairness and respect for the students
- Warmth and sense of humour

5. **CLASSROOM TEACHING METHODS:** Do you feel your teaching includes a variety of methods and strategies? i.e. demonstrations, lectures, small groups, discussions, discovery, debates, field work, simulation games, role playing, panels, laboratories.

"Discussion Points"

- Motivational techniques
- Questioning techniques (sequential, logical, clear)
- Handling of responses (positive reinforcement, listening, correcting)
- Pacing and timing
- Clear instructions (related to application, materials)
- Evaluation procedures

6. **CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT:** Do you feel that your classroom management techniques maintained a positive learning environment?

"Discussion Points"

- Establishment of professional rapport and mutual respect
- Positive reinforcement of class expectations
- Variety of acceptable disciplinary strategies
- Maintains classroom routines, safety and health standards

7. **PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT:** Do you feel that you have been presenting yourself in a positive and professional manner?

"Discussion Points"

- Ability to accept and apply constructive advice
- Professional ethics (confidentiality)
- Rapport with staff and parents
- Appearance - mature model, dress code, consistent behaviours, physical stamina

PART IV
BRIDGING UNIVERSITY AND CLASSROOM DEMANDS - CURRENT PRACTICUM ISSUES

A vital way to establish dialogue with the B.Ed. candidate is by "walking them through" your classroom evaluation procedures. Likewise, an open conversation about their views on the progress of their B.Ed. coursework often leads to a better understanding of their agenda.

There are however, some thorny issues that frequently develop in the practicum when university and classroom realities fail to converge.

ISSUE #1: The candidate is seemingly unprepared for the practicum placement.

Analysis: First, it is helpful to remember that for the candidate, re-entry into the world of the classroom can often be a culture-shock. What was once so familiar is vastly different from the beginning teacher's perspective. The reality of children's varied developmental levels can be especially disorienting, as they move from one practicum placement to another. Not infrequently, the advance information about the placement's responsibilities reaches the candidate just before they are to begin. Then, even if the advance information is received, the Faculty of Education may well not have all the appropriate curriculum resources to help prepare adequately for the practicum. The academic year's expectations (tests, lectures, papers, seminars and project work) may not be in tune with the rhythm of the school year.

Resolution: The first conference becomes vital to "clear the air", to explore reasons why expectations exist and to what degree they can be fulfilled. Ensure that useful advance information is sent to students in plenty of time. The faculty should ensure that associates are informed of placements well in advance. Faculty evaluations and workload should be specifically coordinated with practicum placements.

ISSUE #2: To whose teaching style should I conform?

Analysis: This issue is a very central one. Candidates perceive that much of what they are taught at the university ("This is the only right way"), is vastly different from the eclecticism they see working in actual classrooms ("if it works, use it"). It is quite common that the candidate's general approach to instruction will be quite different than the associate's.

Resolution: Demonstration lessons both by the associate and the faculty advisor can heighten the collegial nature of the practicum, and are a good 'touchstone' for conversation about teaching style.

ISSUE #3: How do I use this evaluation form? It looks very involved.

Analysis: A major difference in faculty evaluation forms is that some are basically anecdotal reports (with a pass/fail) while others employ a multi-point rating scale or marks scaled to 100. The differences between one associate's sense of a first class mark (90) and another's (75) can make the mark appear arbitrary to the B.Ed. candidate.

On the other hand, mutual respect develops between the associate and the visiting faculty advisor when they recognize each other's perspectives. That is, the advisor has a brief two-hour view of the candidate during each practicum, but has evaluated hundreds of candidates in the past; while the associate sees the one candidate close-up, for the whole placement.

Resolution: Concrete solutions to evaluation problems are: that each Faculty provide an annual seminar for associates to talk about their particular evaluation form. Also, the associate may help the B.Ed. candidate to develop methods of self-evaluation (video feedback, reflective seminars with other candidates, clinical analysis).

ISSUE #4: The lesson-plan format doesn't make sense in this classroom.

Analysis: In their first weeks of teaching, formalized lesson plans are important to the B.Ed. candidates. Still, variation in practicum grade levels alone demands that individuals reshape the lesson-plan format for each new placement. Sometimes this 'reshaping' is considered "too radical" by a faculty advisor, or "too time-consuming" by an associate. The B.Ed. candidate is really then caught in the middle.

Resolution: Lesson plans are one of the very best springboards to conversation when the associate and candidate conference. In addition, written feedback on the planning is usually highly valued by the beginning teacher. Certainly the candidate needs to develop planning skills through the formulated lesson plan of the faculty; yet actual classroom realities (centres approach, small group instruction) must affect planning structure. In the case of lesson-plan differences, both faculty and associates need to exhibit tolerance. In difficult circumstances one may need to advocate for the beginning teacher.

ISSUE #5: Whose discipline and classroom management is intact here?

Analysis: Candidates will first observe their host teacher's management style and then try to copy it. Also, management is the one area that can be truly realized only in the practica. Even the best planned lesson can be ruined by early management problems.

Resolution: It is helpful to know that although teachers' models of discipline vary greatly, the B.Ed. candidate must modify their style of discipline in every placement. This flexibility depends upon the associate's careful introduction to routines at the beginning of the practicum. In the first conference, the associate should inform the candidate of who will handle serious discipline problems. Initial weakness in discipline can be strengthened by the associate's support, and the confidence of one or two days of successful discipline.

ISSUE #6: How quickly should the B.Ed. candidate take on classroom responsibilities?

Analysis: The amount of time that a candidate spends actually teaching in the practicum can range from one fifteen-minute session to full days. The proper amount of time is not a fixed unit, but common sense tells us that the first weeks would be less "loaded" with teaching responsibilities than the latter practica.

Resolution: The first day is a red letter day for the associate to model and conference. With a less capable beginner one might continue to provide modelling and conferencing, while with a highly capable candidate the days could be largely devoted to observation and coaching of their efforts. The associate needs to account for growth over all the practicum weeks (only some of which are in their class), as well as allow for progress within the single placement. To quote an anonymous associate: "It's not my job to fail you; it is my job to teach you ... don't be afraid to try."

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